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STATE FOR AF/W PLUMB, INR/AA GRAVES  
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SUBJECT: ASSESSING THE STRENGTH OF THE FORCES NOUVELLES,  
RDR IN THEIR NORTHERN HEARTLANDS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Vicki Huddleston, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. An Embassy team composed of Charge Vicki Huddleston and Econ Chief Ervin Massinga to the Bouake and Korhogo regions, both under Forces Nouvelles (FN) control, and spoke to United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (ONUCI), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Rasssemblement des Republicains (RDR) leaders about the political situation. ONUCI's regional political director Gamaliel Ndaruzaniye was blunt in saying DDR is at a standstill, and that the best that can be hoped for before elections is some genre of "voluntary disarmament." Ndaruzaniye said that Soro has succeeded in consolidating his position within the Forces Nouvelles, and that the consensus within the FN is that I.B. Coulibaly loyalists, probably collaborating with elements within the Presidency, were the authors of the attack. An expatriate Korhogo-region NGO leader, Father Roche, commented on the backing, structure and raison d'etre of the Forces Nouvelles, remarking on the legitimate identification grievances of its rank and file while also exploring the ethnic divisions within the group itself. RDR leaders in Korhogo complained about the 2000 election list, which they believe to be fraudulent, and their belief that the President is making efforts to undermine them and the North as a whole, but were confident that the party would win in any free and fair elections. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Embassy team visited the Center, Center-North and Northwest parts of Cote d'Ivoire from August 11th through the 16th, visiting the regional political/economic hubs of Bouake, Korhogo and Odiene. The group also visited the key "Greater West" region of Man, Duekeue and Guiglo which straddled the former "Zone of Confidence" now dubbed the "Green Line," an uneasy boundary separating North and South; this latter portion of the trip will be reported via septel. During the Bouake/Korhogo portion of the trip, the Charge and Emboffs spoke to well-placed sources with ONUCI, NGOs and the RDR, who collectively provided a useful examination of the state of both the Forces Nouvelles and the RDR.

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ONUCI's Bouake Political Director Describes Soro, Forces  
Nouvelles  
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¶3. (C) ONUCI's Eastern-region Political Director Gamaliel Ndaruzaniye met with the Embassy team at ONUCI's Bouake HQ. Offering his typically frank assessments, Ndaruzaniye (strictly protect) touched on DDR, identification and the

state of play both within the Forces Nouvelles and between the Forces Nouvelles and the President. Ndaruzaniye said DDR is frustrated by the question of ranks; the armed forces' (Forces Armees Nationales de Cote d'Ivoire - FANCI) officer ranks are loath to accept integration of their contemporaries in the Forces Nouvelles who have been promoted faster than they, and the question about what will happen to former non-commissioned officers who have become high-ranking FN officers (many of whom are Zone Commanders, or "ComZones") has not been definitively settled. The issue of standing up the Integrated Command Center and integrating the two armed forces has been slowed. Ndaruzaniye believes that if integration is to succeed there will have to be a disbanding of the militias in the West, to be preceded by success in truly integrating the "Mixed Brigades" which are counted on to bring and keep order in the former Zone of Confidence (septel).

14. (C) According to well-placed World Bank, EU, ONUCI/DDR and UNDP officials encountered during an informal gathering in early August, "integration" of the militaries will likely be achieved by some voluntary demobilization of Forces Nouvelles fighters who don't expect to be integrated into the combined armed forces. Some to-be-determined percentage of the Forces Nouvelles standing units will then simply be declared to be FANCI at some point after the next elections (Note: on August 15, Forces Nouvelles ComZone for Bouake Cherif Ouismame presided over a ceremony in Ferkessedougou launching voluntary demobilization. End Note). On identification, Ndaruzaniye said very little is happening, and that the key step, nominating and putting sub-prefects in place, remained to be done. Comment: The process is very much a GOCI and FN one with the international community observing, encouraging and criticizing. The eventual

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outcomes related to military integration, disarmament and identification are unlikely to fully satisfy the international community because the parties are seeking political solutions. The real test will be whether the political solutions are sustainable over the long term. End Comment.

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Relations Between Gbagbo and Soro  
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15. (C) Turning to the relations between Prime Minister Soro and President Gbagbo, Ndaruzaniye said forthrightly that ONUCI will go forward with a UNSC-blessed investigation into the attack, and that both parties had ample reason to see the probe go forward - "Soro wants it to happen because he suspects the President was behind the attack, and the President wants it to clear his name." (Note: on August 17, ONUCI announced publicly that its investigation team had arrived in Cote d'Ivoire and its mission was underway. End Note).

16. (C) Ndaruzaniye sought to discount oft-heard speculation in Abidjan political circles that Soro has been seriously weakened by the June 29 attack on his life and the subsequent fear that the plot came from within. Arguing that Soro maintains the loyalty of top Forces Nouvelles commanders, he said that the tight, flawless execution of the logistics around the Flame of Peace, carried out by the top leadership in a closely-controlled fashion, belies the notion that Soro has lost control over or is fearful of his senior lieutenants. Ndaruzaniye said the ceremony itself and the concomitant "peace dividend" of bank reopenings and boosted commercial activity help solidify Soro's standing with the population in the North. Speaking of the plot itself, Ndaruzaniye pointed to I.B. Coulibaly without hesitation as the man most suspected by the Forces Nouvelles, but immediately asked "who is it that encouraged I.B. to do it?" The ONUCI Political Director drew parallels between the attack on Soro and the events of February and June 2004,

recalling the still-unexplained death of Comzone "Adams" and later the death of Comzone "Kass" during an anti-Soro uprising allegedly masterminded by Coulibaly, which resulted in the imposition of sanctions on ComZone "Fofie" of the Korhogo region for his role in the deaths of over 60 Coulibaly supporters. (Note: The ONUCI Political Director's speculation is largely in keeping with the conclusions offered by the French Embassy's deputy political counselor Sebastian Minot and Licorne's political analyst Col. Vidaud during an early August gathering with Emboffs. End Note)

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Korhogo Civil Society Leader Discusses Origins, Current State  
of Forces Nouvelles, Their Relations with the RDR  
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¶7. (C) During a visit to a Self Help project in a rural community just south of Korhogo, the Embassy team met with French citizen Father Bernard Roche, leader of a small civil society and development group and 35-year resident of the area. Father Roche described the history behind the Forces Nouvelles' origins and examined the group's internal ethnic and religious differences. In describing the role of I.B. Coulibaly, Father Roche said I.B. was, and remains, very popular with certain segments of the Forces Nouvelles, particularly those from the Dioula group. Many of the Forces Nouvelles chiefs are Dioula, according to Father Roche, as is Coulibaly himself. Their Dioula affiliation, as well as the Christian orientation of many of their number, contrast with the Senefo and Muslim origins of most of the Forces Nouvelles rank and file (Although according to Roche Soro himself is Christian). As evidence of I.B.'s former popularity, Father Roche recalled Forces Nouvelles' ire that led to Roche's 2003 detention by a local commander as he attempted to return to his posting from vacation in France. The commander and his troop saw Roche as a representative of the French and France when Coulibaly was under arrest and facing prosecution for leading the 2002 rebellion.

¶8. (C) Addressing the origins of the Forces Nouvelles, Father Roche was clear in saying the question of identity motivated the youth of his district and the North in general to take up arms. In his small area encompassing two larger

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villages, he said more than 50 young men were under arms, mostly against the wishes of village chiefs. Touching on the conditions that lead to the region's alienation, Father Roche said that the treatment of the northern people by the then-RDR-leaning gendarmerie was deplorable and often rapacious, creating animosity towards the central government (especially its armed forces). As evidence of this, Father Roche said that when the Forces Nouvelles took control of the region, they "eliminated" the most egregious offenders within the gendarmerie, but let go unharmed many who had not preyed upon the population.

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RDR in Korhogo Distrusts President but Confident in Itself;  
Clearly the Most Organized Party in the North  
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¶9. (C) Charge and Emboffs met with Korhogo Mayor and the top officials from the regional Conseil General, all of whom are RDR, elected in the 2000 and 2001 municipal and regional elections (Note: In Korhogo, as well as neighboring Ferkessedougou and northwestern anchor Odienne, the only political party with real headquarters with signs of activity and upkeep is the RDR. End Note). The Mayor and his allies expressed serious doubts as to the sincerity of the President to genuinely address the underlying cause of the division of the country, i.e., the identification question. Noting the attack on Soro took place on the eve of the planned early July launch of the audiences foraines, the Mayor implied the attack was timed to frustrate the will of the Northern people. According to the Mayor, without a thorough effort to

identify and register the people, the war would resume.

¶10. (C) The Korhogo Mayor continued by saying that Prime Minister Soro did the right thing by continuing to implement the Ouaga Peace Accords after the attack on his plane. The recent nomination of magistrates in the North was a welcome advance in that domain, but their demand for certain "conditions" to be met before they actually take up residence and their duties are slowing the efforts of the PM. Similarly, the prefects, named with great public fanfare and "installed" in grand public ceremonies, continue to reside largely in Abidjan, and will remain there until "security" and other "conditions" are improved. While a top civil servant in the Prime Minister's Redeployment of Administration Office told Emboff in early August that the recent funding of redeployment bonuses to government workers had led to a breakthrough in actually deploying government cadres, the Mayor, the Conseil General, and a prominent NGO leader all told the Charge that little to no redeployment of teachers, medical workers or others has taken place.

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Elections Preparations  
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¶11. (C) Turning to elections, the Mayor complained bitterly that the Presidency was gradually taking control of the process, shunting to the side the National Statistical Institute (INS in French) which the opposition tends to trust more than the FPI-led Ministry of Interior and the PDCI-affiliated President of Independent Electoral Commission (the CEI in French, which many international and local civil society leaders see as having questionable administrative abilities). The Mayor said the old electoral list for the region had disappeared, and that the 2000 list (which the CEI has just recently decided to use as a baseline) is riddled with problems and fraud. Addressing the DDR question, the Mayor said that the continued existence of large, pro-FPI militias in the West would prevent real disarmament. Accusing the President of attempting to strangle RDR-controlled municipalities in the North, the Mayor observed that since 2002, salaries and budgets for mayoralities and conseils generals have been cut off.

¶12. (C) Despite this, however, the Mayor averred that the RDR would win the region handily. Pointing to the nationwide 2000 mayoral elections and the 2001 conseil general elections, both of which took place using the "flawed" 2000 electoral list and after the 2000 Presidential elections, the RDR won an absolute majority of votes in both, and large majorities in the North. Using these results as a baseline, the Mayor and his allies in the Conseil General were

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confident that the RDR would prevail in any election.

¶13. (C) Comment. The most pressing issue for true reunification of the North of Cote d'Ivoire with the South is elections in which the population feels it has been fairly represented. Fair representation in turn depends upon an electoral list that incorporates Northern populations that consider themselves Ivorian.

Comment Con't: As for the attack on Soro, it is clear that the consensus opinion in the North increasingly centers on some combination of I.B. Coulibaly, elements within the Presidency, and residual I.B. allies as the authors of the June 29th attack on Soro. Since that incident, it is also clear that PM Soro has solidified his position within the Forces Nouvelles, and that the group is stronger and more unified than many Abidjan-based observers would believe. A similar observation applies to the RDR and its leader, Alassane Ouattara: while his missteps and political maladroitness are justifiably grist for constant commentary, he and his party do retain a solid block of support in the

North, even if they suffer some high-profile defections. The party and Ouattara cannot be discounted in posing a serious threat to President Gbagbo's chances of reelection a free and fair process. The Forces Nouvelles and the RDR may not cooperate hand in glove in their Northern strongholds, and it remains to be seen how their relationship will develop during the electoral campaign. But each seems to be in better shape than many in Abidjan would believe. End Comment.  
HUDDLESTON